

Greene (Wm W.)

SIGNIFICANCE OF A DIPLOMA:

A VALEDICTORY ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

GRADUATING CLASS

OF THE

Berkshire Medical College,

NOVEMBER 19, 1862,

Box 4

BY

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WM. WARREN GREENE, M. D.

29937

PITTSFIELD, MASS.:

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1862.

PITTSFIELD, Nov. 20, 1862.

PROF. W. W. GREENE,

DEAR SIR:—At a meeting of the Alumni of the BERKSHIRE MEDICAL COLLEGE, held last evening, it was the unanimous request of the members that a copy of your address, delivered before the Graduating Class, be obtained for publication.

In behalf of the Society and in discharge of my duty as committee, duly appointed, I take pleasure in announcing to you this fact. Hoping you will favor us with a copy prepared for the press, in addition to your invaluable labors already bestowed and most justly appreciated, I remain,

Yours very truly,

I. W. DOTEN, *President and Com.*

BERKSHIRE MEDICAL COLLEGE, Nov. 21, 1862.

DR. I. W. DOTEN,

DEAR SIR:—The address is at your service. To those of you who know the circumstances under which it was prepared, no apology will be necessary for the marks of haste which it bears.

Sincerely yours,

WM. WARREN GREENE.

ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN OF THE GRADUATING CLASS :

It becomes, to-day, my pleasant duty, in behalf of the Faculty of this College, to recognize you as successful candidates for the Degree of Doctor of Medicine; to give you our right hand of fellowship, and welcome you to all the honors and privileges of our noble Profession.

You have just reason for pride, my new-born brethren, when after long years of study, interrupted and embarrassed, as with some of you it has been, by sickness or pecuniary need, you have proved yourselves worthy of the honors of this Institution, and have received its Diploma; which marks the honorable termination, of your pupilage; which is at once the seal of our confidence and the key that opens the gate of social and legal restraint imposed between the student and practitioner of Medicine. With all my heart I congratulate you upon the position to which you are this day exalted—and I sincerely sympathize with you in all the lively emotions that thrill your hearts to-day: the consciousness of duty done; plans accomplished; obstacles overcome; honor achieved; and position gained; the bright anticipations of return to homes and hearts made glad by your success, and of the fulfilment of glorious hopes in the future.

And yet, gentlemen, this hour is to me full of serious thought. When I reflect that with its close you will leave these quiet halls, sacred to the peaceful pursuits of science, to enter upon a new life; to assume, amidst a jostling, crowding world, all the sacred duties and fearful responsibilities of the Profession, whose title you now wear: that involved in this transition are not only your personal interests; your success or failure in the great struggle on life's battlefield, but the lives, health and happiness of thousands of the human family; I feel that it is a time not only for congratulation and rejoicing, but for sober thoughts and honest words.

We have to-day conferred upon you our certificate of your fitness to enter upon the practice of Medicine; that, if true to yourselves and your trusts, you are fit to assume professional responsibilities. But this Diploma is no warrant of the stand you will take as Physicians. Whether or not in the true sense of the term, you shall *succeed*, is to be decided by yourselves; not by the parchment of any school. Your Degree merely assures the public, so far as we can judge, of your present fitness and of your capabilities for the future. It testifies of what is, of what *may* and *ought* to be, but not of what *will* be. In other words, we say to the world that you

are fit to become the guardians of life and health, and to receive professional honors and emoluments, only upon certain conditions : and now let me give you the burden of my thoughts by briefly telling you what those conditions are.

The first condition then, is *strict temperance in all your habits*. I say first, because upon this depends, to a very great extent, the value of all other qualifications in any individual instance. You are not to pervert or unbend your mental, moral or physical energies by over-eating, over-drinking, narcotics, or by any irregularities or excesses. The public have a right to demand that you shall always be prepared for emergencies, with cool heads, warm hearts and steady hands.

The second, and I believe the *grand* condition, is *Love for your Profession*.

Gentlemen ! have you thoroughly examined yourselves in this matter ? Are you prepared to tell me, why you are here to-day ? Why you have chosen this path for life ? If you have entered our ranks from indifferent choice, looking upon the practice of Medicine simply as a respectable business, or as a means of wealth or position, I can only say that I have no encouragement to offer you of success or happiness in your career, or any guarantee for the public of your ability or fidelity.

Love of your Profession *for itself alone* ; for the rich treasures of knowledge it brings ; for the boundless field for scientific research it opens, and for the glorious opportunities it offers for the exercise of the highest style of intellectual power and of all the moral and christian virtues. Without such love you will lack that devotion which is almost its synonyme, and which is the earnest of success.

The world is full of failures in all departments of life, from ignorance of the law, that taste is, normally, but the offspring of superiority. That every man is naturally fitted to excel in something, and that under proper education this something will indicate itself unmistakably in early life.

Thus one little boy is all engaged in agricultural pursuits, his head full of horses and oxen, ploughs and harrows, and all his childish sports are farm-work in miniature. Another is always in the mechanic's shop, watching the movements of machinery and uses of tools, spends his coppers for knives and gimlets, and makes his own playthings. Another dodges both work and play to bury himself in some choice book, to draw parallels or triangles on his slate, or sketch his baby brother in the cradle—or he wanders to gaze upon the beauty with which the heavens and the earth flood his little soul, till it is bewildered with longings and joy. Or, perhaps, you follow him to some of his retreats, and find him engaged with a collection of frogs, coolly studying Anatomy and Surgery upon the same subject. Now these little fellows are telling you, in the strongest language that Nature can employ, the paths of usefulness and happiness that God designs them to tread ; and from disobedience to these simple teachings the world is full of blighted, withered lives. And yet in ordinary pursuits of life, I can readily conceive, how, thorough mental discipline, a strong will, and a high sense of moral obligation shall ensure earnest and successful labor in whatever position necessity may place the individual ; but I can hard-

ly picture that devotion which will make a man a life-long, earnest student, and a diligent, self-sacrificing, kind yet firm, scientific, yet practical practitioner of Medicine, unless that devotion be born of love ; yea of passion even, which impels the man toward, and binds him to, his chosen work with mysterious and inexplicable bonds ; enobling and tinging with celestial light what otherwise were dull drudgery and toil.

With such devotion you will be, as already intimated, constant students. Instead of spending your leisure hours in clubs or billiard saloons, or lounging in country stores or taverns, you will make the library, the microscope and all other means of refreshing and extending your knowledge, your chosen companions. In addition to the systematic prosecution of any particular branch, you will daily find, in your cases, abundant material for thought and investigation. In fact, however so much a man may boast of his experience, unless he is a constant, earnest student, he is ever going backward.

Again, *you are to be honest in the practice of your profession.* Ignorance is ever the victim of dishonesty and fraud, especially, in Medicine ; for of no other subject of equal practical importance, are the great majority of mankind so profoundly ignorant. With no knowledge of the simplest facts or laws of Anatomical structure, of Physiological or Pathological conditions or processes, with no proper estimate of the conservative or recuperative powers of Nature, or of the *modus operandi* of the therapeutic agents, thus always using the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* style of argument ; is it strange, that, while in the Christian world which enjoys the light of Divine Revelation, written in terms so plain that he who runs may read, we find the Advent Miller and Mormon Young, counting their followers by thousands, the various *isms* and *pathys* in Medicine should have their day ? When, too, we realize that in our own ranks we have so many men whose incompetency and dishonesty is a constant reproach to the profession.

People cannot discriminate in these things. They look upon an individual *Doctor* as a representative member of the whole class ; and if he chances to be a man lacking professional culture or fidelity—one who is constantly giving medicine when time and care would do the work better ; whose Diagnoses may be summed up in a few vague phrases like “Liver Complaint,” “Fever,” “Stoppage of Circulation,” &c. ; who gives drastic cathartics in Peritonitis, and heavy opiates in Enteritis ; diuretics in acute Nephritis and mercury in Anemia ; who sees in a rapid pulse an indication always for antiphlogistic treatment, the activity of which is in direct proportion to the rapidity ; who is thus afloat as a practitioner, always sure when in doubt to do *something*, and do it heroically ; actually destroying more lives than he saves ; can you wonder that any community, ridden by such a man, should give their confidence to the first quack that comes along, no matter what his label ?

Why, gentlemen, he will succeed better, whether he packs them in wet sheets, vomits them with Lobelia, applies Perkins’ “Tractors” to the spine, or tickles their fancy with sugar pellets ; he will allow more patients to recover, especially with these latter

means, than the so called, regular physician, simply because his weapons are less dangerous. Thus it is, that men whose utter lack of philosophy and integrity is cloaked by a diploma from some regular College of Medicine and Surgery, destroy the public confidence in the profession as a whole, and open up the highway over which quackery, in all its forms, travels to the hearts and purses of the people.

This is no flattering picture, but it is true. Ask your venerable President here, laden with honors, as with years, whose life has been an expression of enthusiastic devotion to his profession ; ask him if I say too much in asserting that quackery within the profession is responsible for quackery out of it.

Yes, be honest ; be truthful ; not harsh or rude, but always speak the truth *when you speak*. You are not to magnify trifling ills for the sake of fee or *eclat*. You are not to give medicine or use surgical appliances until you see the indication. Remember your business is to *care* for your patient—*cura—care*. To see him safely through his danger, giving Nature every opportunity to do her own work, ready at any moment to assist her faltering powers.

I am aware that many delicate questions arise here. Mankind are not only so credulous, but capricious, that the man of highest integrity and purest motives may be perplexed as to his duty under certain circumstances. Queen Anne, you know, would insist that she had inflammation of the brain, while Dr. Redcliffe as strenuously insisted that hysteria explained all her symptoms.

Dr. R. was dismissed for his impudence, and a physician called who allowed her majesty to have just such disease as pleased her, thereby adding both to his reputation and purse. With many people it is fashionable to have grave diseases. It is such a comfort to have escaped great danger ; to be able to sympathize with your neighbor in all his sufferings ; to feel that you are a brand plucked from the burning, by the hand of your pet physician ; and it may be questioned whether it is not sometimes allowable in the physician to permit his patients thus to amuse themselves. All such matters you will readily settle by doing just what you believe the good of *your patient* demands, leaving self entirely out of question.

Not only are you to be honest with your patients, but with your professional brethren. You will not credit or circulate the silly gossip that is always floating about "the Doctor," but wait for the evidence.

You will not avail yourself of the credulity of his patients, or of yours ; of the fickle current of popular prejudice or his unavoidable misfortunes, to injure his reputation by wise looks, mysterious nods, or sarcastic words. You will not treat him kindly to his face, and all the time be setting back fires upon his reputation. You are not to visit his patients in his absence, and console them or their friends with the assurance that they will recover *if they are treated properly*.

While you are not to cover crime or conceal gross blunders, or do anything that shall compromise the safety of the sick or your own honor ; you are to remember that he, like yourself, as being mortal is fallible, and that the highest degree of professional knowledge or skill, at present attainable, falls far short of perfection.

Again, you are to be forbearing. Forbearing with the sick, with all their petulance and caprice. Treat them in this respect like children. Forbearing, too, under all the scandal or misrepresentation to which you may be subjected by community, or by your unworthy professional brethren. Do right; devote yourselves with singleness of purpose to your profession, and you can afford to wear all the mud-spots your chariot wheels will throw. Don't soil your fingers by trying to rub them off.

You are to be pure: pure in thought, word and deed. So pure that into your presence, poor stricken humanity comes with child-like confidence and trust, telling all its wants and suffering, receiving all its need, and goes out unblushing and unashamed. So pure that when you enter the family circle, open to you as to none other, its sanctity shall remain as if only the recording angel had been there.

You are to be kind and generous to the worthy poor. Do not misunderstand me upon this point. For the exercise of professional judgment and skill to all who are able to render compensation, charge an adequate fee and *collect your bills*. Nor are you to spend your time and strength for those whose poverty is only the measure of their indolence, or who lack all gratitude or appreciation of your services; unless the public consent to share the burden with you. There are bounds here, which common justice, and the laws of self-preservation even, suggest.

But the helpless child; the lone orphan; the widowed mother; the down trodden; the unfortunate; all appeal to your sympathy and aid, in the name of Him who bore the cross of suffering humanity. And, gentlemen, here is the noblest prerogative of our Profession; that to the lowest and vilest, in the hour of dire extremity, it comes with all its knowledge and skill, sustaining neither loss nor pollution.

You will have sufficient reward in the thanksgivings of grateful hearts, that recognize in you the hand that saved the loved ones from suffering and death.

With benevolence comes moral courage and patriotism. And it is with pride that I claim for my profession, a place second to no other in the exhibition of these virtues. No matter whence the cry for succor; whether from pestilence-stricken cities, or gory battle-fields; quietly and calmly have our brethren gone forth, regardless of hardship or danger, with no sound of trumpets or gilded equipage, simply doing their duty; knowing,

"The fittest place for man to die,
Is where he dies a man."

Let me relate one incident that occurred while I was upon the Peninsula during the bloody campaign of last summer. During the battle of Williamsburg, in the edge of the forest skirting the battle-field, a soldier was struck by a bit of shell which severed the brachial artery. Faint from the profuse hemorrhage, he fell just as a surgeon was riding rapidly past, toward the front, to get orders for establishing a hospital at a certain point. The poor fellow had just strength to raise his bleeding arm and say "Doctor, please!" The Doctor dismounted and rapidly ligated the vessel, applied a compress and bandage, and administered a cordial. As

he turned to go away, the man asked, "Doctor, what's your name." "No matter," said the Surgeon, and leaping upon his horse dashed away. "Ah! but Doctor," said the wounded man, "I want to tell my wife and children *who saved me.*"

Need I tell you how forcibly this brought to my mind, those words of another.

As life's unending column pours,
Two marshalled hosts are seen ;
Two armies on the trampled shores
That death flows black between.

One marches to the drum-beat's roll,
The wide-mouthed clarion's bray ;
And bears upon its crimson scroll,
"Our glory is to slay."

One moves in silence by the stream,
With sad yet watchful eyes ;
Calm as the planet's patient gleam
That walks the cloudless skies.

Along its front no sabres shine,
No blood-red pennons wave ,
Its banner bears the single line,
"Our duty is to save."

For those no death-bed's lingering shades ;
At Honor's trumpet call,
With knitted brow and lifted blade,
In Glory's arms they fall.

For these no clashing falchions bright,
No stirring battle cry ;
The bloodless stabber comes by night,
Each answers, "Here am I."

For those the sculptor's laurelled bust,
The builder's marble piles ;
Anthems pealing o'er their dust,
Through long cathedral aisles.

For these the blossom sprinkled turf
That floods the lonely graves,
When spring rolls in her sea-green surf
In flowery-foaming waves.

Two paths lead upward from below,
And angels wait above,
Who count each burning life drop's flow,
Each falling tear of love.

Though, from the Hero's bleeding breast,
Her pulses Freedom drew ;
Though the white lilies in her crest
Sprang from the scarlet dew ;

While valor's haughty champions wait,
Till all their scars are shown,
Love walks unchallenged through the gate,
And sits beside the throne.

Thus, gentlemen, have I hastily told you what I deem to be the significance of your Diplomas; and although the conditions imposed are a life of self-sacrificing devotion and love to your chosen work; if you are thoroughly imbued with this spirit, they will not seem hard or exacting.

And let me assure you that with these qualities your success is certain. You will have no occasion to search for the "Secret of Success." You hold it in your hands. The world has need of all such men.

Trusting that such a life may belong to each of you, and that at its close you may fall asleep, with saving faith, in the arms of the Great Physician; in behalf of my Colleagues, I bid you an affectionate farewell.